2: Skrefsrud
829

AW42 Santal AW42

/For the native ideas about the society as reflected in informant's description of the society's charters, passim, see category 116, pp. 104-113; 128-131; 189-198./

2: Skrefsrud M-5 (1870-1871) 1942 AW42 Santal AW42

539 (migrated) to the seven-river land Campa[23]. There were two passes, one Cae pass and the other the Campa pass.

In Campa they built a great many forts in order to ensure that enemies should not be able to overcome them. One was the Khąiri fort; this was the fort of the Hąmbrąm people; one was the Kąeṇḍa fort; this belonged to the Kisku people. One was the Campa fort; this belonged to the Murmus. One was the Badoli fort; this belonged to the Marṇḍis; and one was the Sim fort; this belonged to the Ṭuḍu people. There were still other forts; but we have forgotten the names.

In Campa we stayed for ages, and there we were a great people. At that time we were not subordinate to anybody. The "kings" (rulers) were persons of the Kisku sept. The Murmus were from olden times our priests; we call them Murmu Ṭhąkur. The Sąrąns were peons; they were fighters. The Hąmbrąms were the nobility, the Marṇḍis were the wealthy class, and the Ṭuḍus were drumming the dancing- and the kettle-drums, and they were making all kinds of things of iron. The Baske people were buying and selling (merchants). What special work those belonging to the remaining septs had, we do not remember.

Having settled in Campa they placed Maraṅ buru, the Five-Six and the Jahąr era[24] in a sacred grove at the end of the village-street and were worshipping them. The Day-spirit they worshipped at sun-rise every fifth year.

Our ancestors of old have, people say, told, that in olden times, when Ram raja was living, at that time all Kharwar people went with him to Loṅka (Ceylon) and helped him to vanquish Rabona raja; for this reason from then on for a very long time we had no fighting or anything of this kind with the Dekos[25]. They were living in the plains and we in the forests and on the hills. But afterwards we got very much fighting with the Dekos; until this day we have no happy relations with them. As soon as we have cleared the jungle in any country, the Dekos come and rob us of it. Still if the Sahibs[26] nowadays did not help them, we should soon drive them to the other side of the Ganges.

At the time of the insurrection[27] we had intended to make the Ganges our boundary; but

[823] [114] [778] [829] [671] [175] [669]

[23] It is not possible with any certainty to identify the countries mentioned. Skrefsrud thought that the expression "the country of the seven rivers" might be identified with the present Punjab. Others will identify Cae Campa with the country to the northwest of the present Chota Nagpur. As regards the last mentioned, the same name might have reference to two different countries. [24] lit. The Lady of the Sacred Grove. Every Santal village is to have a sacred grove (jahęr) in its vicinity, where possible, a part of the original forest, consisting of sal trees and at least one Mohua tree. More further on. [25] Deko is the name used by the Santals for a non-Santal of the better class, especially Hindus. A Mohammedan will not be so called, if he is recognized as a Mohammedan. [26] i.e., the European courts. The Santal's ideas of justice are not regulated by written laws. [27] The Santal insurrection of 1855, was not aimed against the Government of the day, but was a misguided attempt to get rid of the money-lenders. The Government naturally had to intervene. This insurrection marks the beginning of a new era for the Santals, according to their own estimation in many ways a beginning of deterioration. The mention of the insurrection here is an anticipation.

2; Skrefsrud M-5 (1870-1871) 1942 AW42 Santal AW42

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Get up, get up, do get up, my companion,
Be watchful, be watchful, do be watchful, my companion.
The Badoli people are hitting and killing each other.

For what purpose are they cutting each other, my companion,
For what purpose are they killing each other, my companion,
For what purpose are they hitting and killing each other, my companion?

For the sake of a boundary they are cutting each other, my companion,
For the sake of a landmark they are killing each other, my companion,
For the sake of a landmark they are hitting and killing each other.

Up to Campa we and the Muṇḍas, the Birhoṛ, the Kuṛmbis and others were called by the name of Kharwar[29]. The Birhoṛ were outcasted because they for some cause or other are Hanuman monkeys. Also the Muṇḍas separated themselves there, and the Kuṛmbis gradually became somewhat like Dekos. Some Kharwars joined in marriage with the Dekos called Siṅ[30]; therefore their descendants became Siṅs. Up to the present time these Siṅs are landlords in the old country. Also among the Birhoṛ some became Siṅs. Among these also until to-day some are landlords in the old country. In olden times, people tell, one Siṅ had illicit intercourse with a daughter of a Kisku king, and the girl bore the child out of wedlock and threw it away in the forest. Some wealthy Maṛṇḍis picked this child up and brought it home with them. The child grew up with them, and they named him Mandọ Siṅ. When this boy grew into maturity he became a great and valiant man; as regards intellect or fighting strength, nobody was able to compete with him. He became divan[31] with a Kisku "king". One day he said to the king: "Please, find a bride for me". Having called the council together the king asked them; but nobody would give him, this bastard, a girl to be his wife.

Because of this Mandọ Siṅ became very angry; he said: "If you will not give me a daughter to be my wife, I shall forcibly apply sindur to every girl of yours and defile them". Having heard this the people of the country became awfully afraid and said: "Come along, let us run away". At that time most of them fled; only a few people remained, because they coveted property.

Some people say, it is told, that this Mandọ Siṅ or some other Siṅ was a friend of the Muslims. They fought so fiercely, it is told, with our ancestors, that the sun was shadowed by the shooting of arrows, and when at sun-rise it became light again, the Muslims were angry and said: "Which fellow is it who is coming, a fellow more mighty than we, come,

[192]
[829]

[29] Kharwar is nowadays the more common pronunciation. Some present-day Santals who have wanted to effect a kind of reformation have styled themselves Kharwars. [30] Possibly Rājputs. Siṅ means a lion; Paharias and many Bhūiyas in the Santal Parganas like to style themselves Siṅs. [31] Minister, General manager.

2: Skreferud M-5 (1870-1871) 1942 AW42 Santal AW42

others) originally belonged to the Kherwars, especially to the Kisku and Baske septs. It is also told that those who left the Kherwars and became Dekos spread in all directions. 539 829

We are here touching on one of India's problems, and a few words may be permitted. First as regards the wanderings of the Santals, as they may be observed at present and probably are a repetition of what has happened in earlier times. The Santals are among the very best of clearers of jungle in India, themselves originally a forest people. But they have not reached the stage of being really good agriculturists; it must also be remembered that they have very little understanding of the use of money; they may be said to know the value of a pice, but do not know the value of the rupee. What often follows is this: they get into the hands of the moneylenders who will do all they can to get hold of the fields cleared by the Santals, who frequently will not know or think of any other way of getting out of their difficulties than by emigrating to some other place, always towards the rising of the sun. Combined with this we have their backwardness as agriculturists: they have little idea of getting all that is possible out of the lands they have cleared or are occupying. They are a prolific race; the time comes when they have not enough land to support themselves. The result is, that either the whole family, or some of them, will go away, either to find fresh jungle to clear and occupy, or to work for others as labourers. It is in their blood to seek fresh fields; as they often are heard to say, they have a wish "to see land". Now if the whole family does not move away, some will stay; those who stay will gradually get under the influence of the more civilized neighbours and may ultimately become attached to these. 167 241 [436] [426]

After this digression a little more about the traditions. As regards Mandǫ Sin (by some also called Madhwa or Madhǫ) some have a very detailed story, something like a folk-tale. A servant girl is stated to have been with child by some of the young men of "the kings", who threatened to kill her if she revealed anything. She bore her child in the forest and left him there, but came every day to suckle him. This went on for two months; then one day the mother did not come quickly; the child became hungry and commenced to cry. Some Kisku girls heard this, found the child and brought it home with them. They were convinced that the child was that of the girl; nothing was said about this, but they asked the girl to take charge of the child, saying that they had adopted it. The child grew up, became very intelligent and clever in all kinds of work. The king gave him office, and he gradually became indispensable. After some time the king asked him whether they had given him a wife; and as this was not the case the king ordered him to bring all the principal men to him, he wanted to ask them the reason for this. In spite of orders and persuasion they would not come and would not be brought, although the king sent elephants, horses, etc., to carry them. The king became angry and ordered Madhwa to go and apply sindur to all the daughters of these men, to the girls he might care to make his wives. He consequently went to these men and asked them whether they would 539

2; Skrefsrud M-5 (1870-1871) 1942 AW42 Santal AW42

178 684

rupees. Nowadays who can say whether they take them to the courts or not? Besides this we have a couple of shameful sins that are not publicly mentioned.

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When anyone has caused any loss, we make them pay the price or the estimated damage, and we also fine them. We fine both who strike each other, when both are guilty, otherwise one of them. If bullocks or cows butt and kill each other, we take the one who caused the death; and if anyone kills a bullock by ploughing or beating it, we make him pay its price. Anyone who falsely complains or makes a claim, him we punish contrarily. Those who without cause backbite people, we fine heavily.

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A girl who commits the fault of mounting a tree in the sacred grove, or of entering the sacred closet in a man's house, will have to give a sacrifice animal.

177 178 686 829

When there is a dispute in connexion with the boundaries, the Pargana and the village headmen of the neighbourhood come together and settle the matter; and when there is a dispute in connexion with riceland, the village headman and the village council settle the matter. They fine the guilty person. These two kinds of mutual robbing have spread over the whole country through the instigation of the Dekos; otherwise formerly we had no such quarrels. Nowadays the Dekos also rob us of our villages; they both encroach on our boundaries and steal our riceland. People say: The Dekos enter like a needle, and they swell to be as large as a plough-share. They are also making us rob each other and quarrel. Where they are, there is no peace. Causing false evidence to be given in the courts, they rob us of all we have; and the magistrates do not understand our language; therefore we shall probably some day in the future again have to run away somewhere. If Deko cats were not living among Santals, it would be good for us Santals.

2; Skrefsrud M-5 (1870-1871) 1942 AW42 Santal AW42

X. BELIEFS CONNECTED WITH THE BONGAS

a. The witches.

754 Witchcraft[1] is the great trouble with us Santals. Because of witchcraft people in the village become enemies, the door of relatives is shut, father and sons quarrel, brothers are separated, husband and wife are divorced, and in the country people kill each other. [829] If there were no witches, we should have constant great happiness. The Europeans judge well in all matters, so far as their knowledge goes; but in connexion with witchcraft they are somehow or other blinded; we cannot understand it. The witches eat us; and when we catch them and worry them just a little, the magistrates again turn the matter round and resort to imprisonment; we feel great distress; what can we possibly do, so that it might go well with us; we are utterly bewildered. Also when we explain it to the magistrates, they do not believe it; they say: Well then, let her eat my finger; then only shall I believe that she is a witch, — and then they jail you. The witches do not eat using a vessel and a knife, quite so; by sorcery they send people off to the other world, straight away. [622] Formerly the village headman and his deputy were subduing them, and if they would not be peaceful, they would, together with the village people, drive them away from the village after having disgraced them; but nowadays the magistrates have made them utterly audacious, so that we men have become absolutely disheartened.

[562] The word of a man does not go any more; the woman have become the absolute rulers in this age. If you say just a little to her, she will at once throw it into your mouth; fearing this you keep quiet, what can you do else.

The witches have their councils at night, in a forest or an open plain somewhere. When they go out, they put a worn broom or the like down on the bedstead with the husband, and he thinks: my wife is here, because on account of the magic he sees this broom like his wife; but the wives have gone to the bongas to be married to them. It is told they do not go on foot; they climb up into some tree or other and go by magic like the wind. They come down at the playing ground of the bongas and dance with the bongas; they call tigers to themselves; they comb them, kiss them; then they subdue the bongas and make them swear that they shall not appear when divination is made. Having acted in this way they return home at cockcrow.

[1] Cf. Bodding: Witchcraft among the Santals. Oslo Etnografiske Museums Skrifter, vol. 2, p. 2. Oslo 1942.

31 Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1953-1959) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

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Fourth stanza:—

For land are they fighting,
For boundary are they fighting,
For homestead are they fighting.

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Here an explanation is forthcoming as to who the Kharwars were. We have already seen that some Kharwars are said to have accompanied Ram Chandra, in his fight against Ravana of Lanka (Ceylon). Now the Santal traditions say that upto the period the people were at Campa, the Santals, Birhors, the Mundàs and Kurmbis (Kurmis)[1] were called Kharwars. The Birhors were outcast because they ate the flesh of monkeys, considered as their taboo.[2] At Campa, the Mundàs were gradually separated and the Kurmbis gradually adopted Hindu customs.

We hear that some Kharwars entered into matrimonial alliances with a section of the Hindus known as Siùs. Gradually their descendants became known as Siùs. They founded kingdoms. Some Birhors also became Siùs.

It is narrated that in ancient times one of the Siùs lived as man and wife with a daughter of a

1. A Santal can now even marry a Kurmbi girl. They are now found more in Hazaribagh, Manbhum and Purulia. [582]

2. The Santals of Mayurbhanj said that they never ate monkeys. [262]

Jt Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

173
829 Kisku Rapaz (King) and a son was born in a forest. The child was found by the Mārṇḍis who adopted him and named him Mandò Siñ. The child grew up to be an infant terrible. He surpassed every one in knowledge and battle and later became the chief officer of the Kisku Rapaz. One day he asked the king for a bride to marry. But none would give him his daughter to marry. Mandò Siñ grew furious and threatened, "If they do not give me a bride, I shall take to wife each and every girl" (by forcible application of vermilion or red dust on her forehead).

Hearing this the people became frightened. The greater portion of the population left the country, the remainder only stuck to their properties.

From Campa, the forefathers of the Santals came to a place known as Tore Pokhori Baha Bandela. There they remained for a long time. Somehow or other, the Dekos also came with the people over there.

Here it is that the sojourners fixed their religious rites and ceremonials. We learn that they gathered under the shades of a "tope sarjòm" tree [a tree of the "sal" (*Shorea robusta*) variety] by the side of a spring and sitting on lotus-leaves, began a long discussion to fix the details of their customs. We hear that they decided to observe the ceremony of *Narta*, performed three or five days after child-birth, and other ceremonials connected with marriage and death.

[846
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Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

Here they cast aside many of the customs of their 173
forefathers, but no explanation is forthcoming at this 829
date as to why they did so. Henceforth, their customs resembled those of the Hindus more and more. We learn that in ancient times, the Santal [764]
forefathers did not burn their dead, nor did they carry the bones of the dead men to the Damodar river for being consigned in its holy water. Previously, they buried the dead men. But all these were changed here. In marriage, the Hindu custom of [585]
applying vermilion to the forehead of the bride was [177]
henceforth adopted.

Next, the early Santals came to Icàk' buṭà (under the shade of a tree named Icàk'). As the women- [824]
folk crossed the bog and gathered under a *mòhua* tree they were struck with wonder to find that the lotus-leaves they had trodden under their feet and the marks of *arta* (equivalent to Hindu *alta*, a red pigment applied by the Hindu women to dye the sides of their feet) were absolutely undisturbed and intact. From this strange phenomenon they were convinced that they had done the right thing in changing the customs and resolved that they should henceforth stick to the changes.

The early Santals lived at Icàk' buṭà for a long 173
time. But, as before, they migrated. The reasons are again uncertain, some ascribing it to the fear of the Turuks. As they were passing on, they found

B Mukherjea O, Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal-AW42

Here the Santals became the tenants of the king of Sikhàr but we hear that the Dekos seized their lands and property and drove them away. It is at Sikhàr that the Santals learnt how to observe the *Chatapòròb'* (one of Santal festivals). From Sikhàr some of the Santals came to Ṭuṇḍi near Dhanbad.

The Santals regard stability as the biggest of their tribal problems. Their forefathers exhorted upon them not to cross the river Ajoy, but they had to go against their wishes for the sake of bread. And in course of time they have found themselves in the Santal Parganas. With a characteristic naiveté, the Santals say that like the caterpillars

But the people would not change their religion, so they left their chief to rule over the Hindus, and wandered on to the Santal Parganas where they are settled now."

People of India, App. VIII, pages clviii-clix. Risley has some reflections on the origin of the name "Santal." He says that according to Mr. Skrefsrud it is a corruption from "Saontar" and was adopted by them after their sojourn for several generations in the country about Saont in Midnapur. Before they went to Saont they were said to have been called Kharwar, the root of which, *khar* is a variant of *hòr*, 'man', the name which all Santals use among themselves. Col. Dalton expressed a doubt whether the name of the place may not have been taken from the tribe, "a doubt strengthened by the discovery of a small tribe of Saonts in Surguja and Keonjhar." Risley does not think the point of importance as the Santal always now calls himself "mañjhi."

1. Chata-pòròb = Observed in Mayurbhanj on the 12th day (Dwadasi) before the Bhadra Purnima (full-moon in the month of Bhadra, Aug-Sept).

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 8 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42
MAYURBHANJ

175 668 614 this we do not know anything and no light is available to assert that *Kharwar* was ever a clan name.

174 101 668 It should, however, be noted here that the Mayurbhanj Census Report, 1931, (Vol. I, p. 215) opines that "the present Santals are the descendants of the section of the tribe who became followers of Bhagirath (the leader of the Kharwar movement)—a Santal who endeavoured to start a movement to turn out the Sahibs and Zemindars out of the country and who was tried for sedition in 1871 and imprisoned at Bhagalpur where he died."

Gòndwars

114 614 The Santals of Mayurbhanj when questioned invariably answered that they were twelve clans, but they made no mention of the *Bedea* (supposed to be lost) and made up for the deficiency by mentioning *Gòndwars*. This was remarkable as in no other account do we come across such a name. In course of searching enquiries also we could not meet any *Gòndwar*. [The Mayurbhanj Census Report (1931, Vol. I, p. 192) also mentions the clan.]

614 563 829 The general belief among the Santals is that *Gòndwars* occupy a low position among them as they are supposed to be a cross between *Gònd-Muṇḍà* and *Santals*. There is in existence in Mayurbhanj a class of "Hansdak's" called "Gòndwar-Hansdak's" and they are considered distinctly low in the esti-

31 Mukherjee O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42
MAYURBHANJ

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mation of the Santals, as distinct from other sub-clans as "Kuda-Hansdak,'" "Bale Hansdak'" who are considered pure. It is said that the *Gòndwars*, in their attempt to conceal their real identity declare themselves as belonging to the *Sòrèn* clan, whereas, in their manner of worship they differ from the Sòrèns radically, thereby giving a clue to their identity.

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The derivation of the very word *Gòndwar* points to their connexion with the Gònds. The ending "war" probably means "relating to." In saying so, we rely on the fact that one of the sub-clans of the *Murmus* call themselves *Khedwar-Murmu*. According to them they derived the name from the circumstance that their progenitors chased and hunted a "Murum" (*Nil gae* ; *Portax Pictu*). *Khedwar* here means those related to a chase (*khed* = chase, *war* = relating to).[1]

Clan Exogamy and Totemism

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192

At this stage we should note that all these clans are exogamous ; and presumably to preserve the blood from being contaminated by unconscious incest, they have certain pass-words to distinguish

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1. Regarding Bedeas, Kharwars and Gòndwars, we must acknowledge the help received from Moulavi M. Laeequddin, Census Officer, Mayurbhanj.

[115]

3i Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

I saw not—cared not for the light,
That leads the blind to heaven.

Such a disillusionment perhaps lay in the subconscious mind of an educated Santal lad of Mayurbhanj, who asked us pathetically, "Please tell me if we have any religion."

This should be studied in the background of deeper moorings in the heart of the Santals as a result of centuries of culture-contact with the rest of the population, mostly Hindus. We have already seen that these tribals have mostly lived not in watertight compartments, but cheek by jowl with the rest of the more civilised people of India. So slowly and imperceptibly, acculturation has been going on.

One carefully traversing through the Santal myths and tradition comes to the inevitable conclusion that for ages and ages they have tried to form a part of the Hindu society. Use of vermilion during marriage, wearing of *alta* marks on the feet of women, characterising the Supreme deity as Thakur Jiu, obeservance of festivals like Charak (Pata—the hook-swinging festival), the strange resemblance of some Santal dances with the *Rass* dance as described in the Vishnu Purana, the singing of essentially Vaishnava songs during the *Sohrae*, the shouting of *Haribol* during marriage, funeral and other ceremonies, the worship of Durga in Mohul-

4: Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

771 782 796 Thus in religion proper the main attitude of Santal Society towards the supernatural, is one of reverential fear in the presence of certain mysterious supernatural powers and beings and dependence on and propitiation to and prayerful submission to them, and the result expected is the averting of the ill-will and securing the good will of the supernatural beings and good luck to man in crops and cattle, health and progeny.

771 776 778 782 [784] The Santal religion is also not a little concerned with ancestral and certain other disembodied souls and Nature-spirits and deities. The rites employed to establish relations with them are mainly supplications and prayers, offerings of sacrifices and the ceremonial sharing of sacrificial food besides certain special observances and taboos.

771 [754] [796] The Santal believe that the supernatural influence is not often inimical and evil. Their idea is that there is no possibility of malevolent influence being turned to a benevolent or good one, the only practical question for them is how to stop it and, in the case of witches, how to stop and punish it. Bongas and witches know how to do evil to people but more often than not also how to do them good.

771 829 [182] The Santal religion in its social aspect is essentially a tribal matter and has helped to strengthen the social unity and quicken the sense of social responsibility, and his concept of righteousness is bound up with his social or tribal consciousness. As the Santal Society has not yet got much beyond a limited tribal consciousness his conception of righteousness is not concerned with the essential or absolute standard of righteousness of things.

St Culshaw M-S (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

They owe their present position of affluence to Santal habits of insobriety. Secondly, much of the land has been acquired by trading castes from Bihar who followed the Santals when the country was being opened up. They brought with them such things as salt and cooking oil, which they exchanged for grain. Clothing was added at a later date, for until within living memory Santals largely wove their own clothes from cotton grown on the lands surrounding their homesteads. Like the Sundis, these traders provided credit facilities for their customers and so gained power over them. The monsoon fails on the average once in seven years in Western Bengal, and the traders import grain in times of scarcity. Formerly this was lent out at a recognized rate of interest amounting to 100 per cent. per annum. The only security which a Santal had to offer was a mortgage on his land, and, if the trader wished it, the almost inevitable result was an action in the courts, followed by an auction at which the creditor purchased the land. The third important class among the landlords are the Brahmins, descendants of the men who were brought into the country to act as priests and court officials to the local *rajas* or rulers. At the time when British rule was being established many of these *rajas* exercised control over tracts of country that were largely covered by forest and sparsely inhabited. They encouraged Santals and some other peoples to settle as cultivators, and they also rewarded the services of their Brahmin officials by grants of land. Brahmins are forbidden by caste rules to engage in cultivation, so they in their turn encouraged Santals to become their tenants.

The Santals have a proverb: "A *Deko* friend is like a thorn fence." In other words, if you stumble into it you are liable to suffer from scratches. They sometimes make fun of themselves and exaggerate the fear that they feel. Thus: "The elders used to run away and hide in the jungle whenever they saw an umbrella approaching the village." But in spite of the fun, the fear persists. A difficulty arose a few years ago in a village Santal church when the superintending missionary placed there as pastor a man who was a *Deko*. This resulted in a vigorous protest, and the leader of the villagers' delegation summed up their feelings in the following parable: "When a kite is wheeling overhead the chickens all take shelter under their mother's wings. After they have grown up they know that the kite can do them no harm, but nevertheless whenever a kite is overhead they quake inwardly and cannot get on with their pecking." In the company of non-Santals, a Santal is inclined to become tongue-

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829 571 tied. Even men who enjoy a wide reputation in their own tribe become ineffectual when engaging in a discussion with *Deko*, a factor which nullifies many of the advantages that they might otherwise gain by their representation on local self-governing bodies. The difficulty is not simply one of language, for those who reach such positions are men of some education who have a command of Bengali; it is caused by the old fear of the chicken for the bird of prey. Santals themselves complain that their own representatives are not "cunning" enough.

648 829 With certain of the lower castes who are cultivators like themselves the Santals claim a special relationship. Chief among these are the Kurmi or Mahato, who are looked upon as distant kinsfolk. "Formerly", said an informant, "they used to look on us as their younger brothers. At their weddings we used to carry away their baskets of sweets, and in fact without our presence their weddings could not take place. They sacrifice pigs at the time of the *Sohrae*. Our ancestors used to tell the story of how during the rule of the Moslems the Kurmi were oppressed. They had great trouble to survive. It is said that one day when we Santals were celebrating a *Mak' Mòṛẹ* festival, a band of Moslems was driving a group of Mahato before them. They came right into the place where we were sacrificing, but even so they did not lose caste. In this way they are co-sharers with the Santals." Here, however, is some Santal lore that is not altogether to the credit of the Mahato: "All the Mahato women have to learn witchcraft. If any of them does not do so, she cannot get married. For this reason when a Mahato party is seeking a bride the first question which they ask is, 'Has she learnt witchcraft or not?' "

[539]

563 [829] There are other stories of related peoples, e.g. the Deswali, who are said to have resulted from the union of a local *raja* with a Santal girl, and there are a number of castes with whom they live in close contact. The most interesting of these is the Kamar caste, workers in iron. The Santals would appear to have been using iron implements both in agriculture and in hunting for a very long period, but they do not work in iron themselves. Until comparatively recently, iron smelting from ore gathered on the hillsides was common and the smelting was done by the Kamars. Modern industry has brought this to an end, but the sites of old furnaces can still be identified by the heaps of iron slag, which the Santals call "iron excrement". The Kamars, however, are still blacksmiths. Every moderate-sized village contains a family of Kamars who have been granted a piece of land from the

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separate representation. In the elections to the Bengal Provincial Legislative Assembly which took place in 1946 a Santal offered himself for election for the first time from the Bankura Rural Scheduled caste constituency. He was a member of one of the rare well-to-do Santal families and had received education up to the Intermediate Arts standard of the Calcutta University at the mission college in Bankura. He stood as an "Independent" and he was supported by the Moslem League organization, but he failed to be elected. His rival was a non-Santal member of the Scheduled castes who was a Congress candidate. No Santal has yet been elected to the Bengal Provincial Assembly.

The fact that the dominant Santal attitude to their neighbours is one of suspicion and latent hostility does not mean that this has always been the case. There are some indications pointing to a time when relations between Santals and Hindus were more friendly than they are today. The story already related about the Mahato is one. It may well have been that during the period of Moslem suzerainty the aboriginals made common cause with the Hindus. To go back much farther, P. O. Bodding[1] has suggested that in the story of the *Ramayana*, one of the great Hindu epics, there is a hint of an alliance between aboriginals and the hero of the epic, Ram, when he made war against the King of Lanka. The reference is to the assistance given by the "Hanuman log", or monkeys, who, it has been inferred, may well have been in fact human beings of the stock from which the ancestors of the present-day Santals were drawn. In Santal folklore there are stories which describe the marriage of human beings with monkeys, and there is little doubt that such stories symbolize the results of interracial marriages.

Living as they do in close contact with their neighbours, the Santals have borrowed heavily from the ideas and institutions around them, and in some cases they have doubtless contributed to the common stock. It is almost impossible to isolate certain features in their culture and say that these have been borrowed from non-Santal sources. That which is distinctive in Santal culture is the way in which they have used a common background to conserve their tribal life and to provide themselves with the rudiments of a philosophy. The retention of their language as a vigorous element of their own culture must have preserved much from the ancient days of their own life, and has to some extent cut them off from familiarity with the epics

[1] *District Gazetteers: Santal Parganas.*

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different kinds of rice fields are Bengali. Maize, a cereal that is important in their economy, has a borrowed name, but other lesser cereals retain their Santali names. In Bankura the Santals have lost the use of their own numerals beyond seven, though apparently these are known and commonly used elsewhere. Even so, in Bankura the Santal word for "twelve" is still used in phrases connected with the recital of tribal traditions, as in the phrase *gelbar paris*, meaning the "twelve clans". Iron has a Santali name, but other metals now in use, such as lead, copper and brass, have Bengali names. In addition to brass and earthenware utensils, the Santals make extensive use of the leaves of the *sal* tree (Santali *sarjom*), which they plait to form many varieties of plates, cups, pipes and cigarettes, and they possess a wide vocabulary to distinguish between the different kinds. Brass and earthen pots they buy from others.[1]

The difficulties of determining the extent of their borrowings in the field of religion may be illustrated by the fact that the language of spells and of prayers offered at the time of sacrificing contains a strong admixture of Hindi-Bengali words. This would seem to indicate that there have been many borrowings at this point; but it is also possible that the one who makes the prayers, wishing to put himself into a favourable relation with the spirits, uses a special vocabulary and so removes himself from the common run of his people when he is acting as a mediator between them and the spirit world. Many of the songs sung nowadays are composed in Bengali. There is a large stock of riddles, some of which are asked and answered in Santali, others of which are asked and answered in Bengali, while yet others make use of both languages.[2]

Only incidental reference has been made to the impact of Moslem culture on Santal life. Reminiscences occur of the period of Moslem rule, such as the following statement: "Concerning the *Turuk* (*Turuk*, or Turk, the name by which Santals refer to Moslems), it is said that they ruin our spirits because they cut the throats of fowls the wrong way. If we eat

[1] Another discussion of the linguistic evidence, giving many examples, and the whole stated from a somewhat different point of view, is to be found in Professor Sten Konow's introduction to Hodding's collection of Folk-Tales.

[2] In a suggestive article published in *Africa* for June 1946, Professor F. C. Bartlett has expanded his thesis in the Julian Huxley lecture of 1944 that each primitive culture displays both "hard" and "soft" points. The methods which he has outlined for determining, in the examination of any particular culture, what constitute the hard and soft points, and in particular the story method, may furnish valuable results when applied to the study of Santal culture.

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the food of the *Turuk*, rice or other food, the spirits will run away. If anyone has fever or if we want to exorcize a spirit, we try to give him curds made by a *Turuk* to eat. They say that in olden times one Mirza Turuk drove us from the country we were in. On a certain plain we made ready twelve carts and fled away across the open country. Mirza Turuk searched and could not find us. He thought: 'I must search for the tracks of twelve carts.' However, as we drove the twelve carts one behind the other, we made only one track, and so he never found us." The local Moslem population is very small[1] and confined to one or two villages of weavers and cultivators, who are themselves deeply affected by the Hindu environment. No doubt the story is very different in those districts of Northern Bengal where the Moslems predominate, but even there the great dissimilarity between Moslem and Santal culture probably militates against influences passing from the one to the other.

Christian influence, the result of a sustained and conscious effort on the part of missions, is considered later. Of deliberate efforts to Hinduize the religious practices and beliefs of the Santals the area is ignorant.

Note to Chapter 4

The relation of the aboriginal peoples to Hindu society has given rise to much controversy and discussion in India, not all of which is conducted in a spirit of scientific inquiry. An able presentation of many of the facts dealt with in this and the previous chapter, together with much else, and written from the Hindu standpoint, can be found in *The Aborigines—"So-called" and Their Future*, by G. S. Ghurye, Ph.D. (Cantab.), published by the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1943.

[1] The figures given for the local Moslem population in 1931 were as follows:

	Males	Females
Randsandh Thana	238	190
Raipore Thana	358	478

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The years pass, indistinguishable one from another except when famine or other calamity makes a landmark on which the memory will fasten in the years to come. Ten years ago many of the older men dated their birth according to whether they were born before or after "Seventy-two", the Bengali year 1272, when a disastrous famine broke up many families. Another memorable year was the year of the influenza epidemic that followed the close of the 1914–18 war, and young people today can calculate their age in relation to the year of the *malot*, or epidemic. The division of the year into months is somewhat vague, for whereas the only names for the months now current are the twelve months of the Bengali calendar, the Santal reckoning is based on the moon. As one man remarked: "We sometimes have to slip a month." In 1939, when this statement was made, there was confusion in the Santal calendar between *Bhador* (the Bengali month extending through a part of August and September) and *San*, the month that precedes it. Names are given to the phases of the moon according to its shape. Thus I was told: "The *Ende* (the Ind festival which in West Bengal is associated with Dharma worship) is observed during the month of *Bhador*, when the moon is shaped like an open umbrella."

The days of the week also have Bengali names, and the day is divided into periods, the names of which relate in some cases to the meals taken, in other cases to the duties which have to be performed or to a more general association of the time. When Santals wish to make an appointment at a particular time it is sufficient to point to the position in the sky where the sun will have climbed. Some time before dawn it is "little cockcrow", and this is followed by "cockcrow". *Basiam*, the time when breakfast is taken, is divided into three parts: "child *basiam*", "*basiam*" and "bent *basiam*". The word *basiam*, meaning "leftover", is a reminder that the breakfast consists of a small quantity of cold rice or rice gruel, cooked with the evening meal on the previous day and kept for the morning, when it is eaten with a little salt. The late afternoon is called the "time when women draw water". One way of describing a short period is to relate it to the time taken in boiling a pot of rice. Work is continued until the shadow of a house or a tree falls across a particular spot. It happens frequently that children draw a line outside their schoolhouse, so that when the shadow of the building falls across the line they know it is time to go home. A man who was in the habit of sleeping in

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his courtyard after the midday meal used to make sure of rising at the right time by telling his children to waken him when the shadows had reached a certain spot. 805

During the night the time is indicated not only by the position of the moon but also by the stars, and particularly by reference to the constellation Pleiades. There are at least two myths relating to the sun and the moon. In the one the sun is male and the moon female, while the stars are their children. The absence of the stars from the sky in daytime is explained by a story that they made a pact to eat their children. The sun carried out the bargain and so there are no stars visible by daylight, but the moon evaded her promise and so some of the children survived. The other version says that both the sun and the moon are male; they became related to each other by marrying each other's sisters. Only a few of the stars and constellations are named. The Pleiades have the same name as one of the clans; the Milky Way is known as the "cow track", and the Great Bear is the "old woman's bed". 273 821 [805]

Between the harvest and the Spring festival, a period which corresponds with the cold weather, the villages present a deserted appearance, due to the annual migration to the east for work in the harvest fields of the Ganges delta. This seasonal migration, dictated by economic necessity, plays an important part in the life of the area. Further to the north many Santals work in the coal-mines round Asansol, while to the south labour is drawn to the great steel town of Tatanagar. In this area migration to industrial centres is rare; the Santals regard the conditions in industrial towns as highly dangerous to health, and they affirm that nothing will induce them to go there. The same reason, however, does not prevent them from leaving their own villages in a non-malarious tract of country for the malarious rice-growing areas farther east, in consequence of which the money earned is often more than spent in the expenses of protracted illness and long periods of idleness. Each village organizes its own party of migrants, who go to work for the same masters year after year. The wages they receive are more than double what is paid in their own locality, and so they earn the money required to pay rent, to meet social expenditure for marriages, and to pay off old debts. The homes are left in charge of the aged, and some of the children are left behind. The villages are denuded of able-bodied men and women, apart from a few who do not need to go. Family parties travel together, babies and very young children being carried 221 166 464 [829] [164] [434] [465] 221 166 [855] [484]

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by their parents. It is no uncommon sight to see a man striding along the road with a carrying pole across his shoulders; in the basket slung from one end he carries some of the family cooking utensils, while the youngest member of the family sits confidently in a basket at the other end. The immediate economic advantage of this annual migration, without which they might be forced to leave their present homes with dire consequences for their tribal stability, is secured at a heavy price. In addition to the toll on their health, tribal sanctions are loosened away from the village. Offenders against the tribal law, runaway brides, women accused of witchcraft, and many others who do not wish to submit to discipline can find a refuge away from their homes, and each year the number of those who elect to stay "east" is growing.

The older generation regard the yearly exodus as the prime cause of moral laxity because it flouts an old taboo. Formerly no Santal was supposed to cross the Damodar river, which forms the northern and eastern boundary of the Bankura district. When at first men were drawn away to work over the river the women were not allowed to accompany them. The reason given for this prohibition was that by crossing the river they would bring misfortune on themselves and their villages. The underlying causes may be connected in part with the fact that the tribal gods are forest gods and could not protect them on the other side of the river, where there are no forests; and partly linked with the fact that the Damodar has an important place in their customs for disposing of the dead.[1] Whatever they be, the old taboo is now ignored.

During the last few days of *Pus* (mid-January) and at each month's end till the Spring festival, parties of men, women and children can be seen returning along the roads in single file, the women always in front. They are bent on reaching their own villages before the festivities which mark the turn of the month. The old people watch for their return and the relieving of their responsibilities. They enjoy greater leisure and may be seen more often squatting on the narrow ledges that surround the houses, sunning themselves. As men and women return from the east they find employment chiefly in felling trees and in carting both wood and leaves to the railway. For many years the traditional attitude of the Santal to the forest has been to make clearings and begin cultivation. The forests of the area are privately owned by the landlords, and they are exploited

[1] See Chapter 12, p. 153.

for their timber.

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However, they could not find Ote and Bole; they searched everywhere, but they saw no tracks but the tracks of the *nilgai* and the wild buffalo. Nowadays the Santals say that the Ote and Bole who were then lost have become the ancestors of the 'sahibs'. One reason why we say this is that often when we are beginning to dance and at the commencement of songs someone calls out these words: 'Look, friends, the white hare has run away.'[1] This saying is the signal to begin the dance. The word 'sahib' is amongst us for a long time; in many ways our customs are the same."

This rather obscure piece of reasoning is in fact widely current among the Santals, at any rate among those who are unfamiliar with the origin of the word "sahib" and its currency in India during Moslem times. "White hare" is a term often applied to Englishmen. On one occasion I emerged rather suddenly from the waiting-room at a wayside station on to the platform near to where a group of Santal women were unloading a railway wagon. Unaware that I might understand their conversation, one of the women remarked, "The white hare has just come out of its hole!" greatly to the amusement of her companions. Babulal relates at this point how the brothers were met in the forest by *Maraṅ Buru* and led by him to the foot of various trees.[2] Babulal places the story in Moslem times. He makes the following remarks about *Maraṅ Buru* and his actions: "*Maraṅ Buru* deceived them so that when they wanted to offer sacrifices to *Ṭhâkur* they should do it in his name, afterwards to the Old Lady of the Grove, and then to the 'Five and Six'. In former days he used to be called *Liṭa godet'*, *Liṭa* the bailiff. *Maraṅ Buru* became the guardian of the ancestors. He used to take them out hunting and taught them how to kill iguanas, water-snakes, squirrels, mongoose and hares. On such days as they caught nothing in the chase he used to show them the dead cattle at the end of the village street, and would say to them: 'It is quite all right for us to eat these too; these are white deer.' And so we began to eat all these things."

He offers some more information about the Flower festival in his narrative: "In the prayer at the time of the Flower sacrifice we must use these words in addressing the spirits: 'If you are not pleased with the offering we shall dishonour your mother.' We consider that the spirits will listen to us if we use these words. We also say that if we urinate in a standing

[1] Another form of this saying is given in Chapter 6, p. 67.
[2] See Chapter 6, p. 66.